1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

be successful, he can count on the members of his family for financial and moral support.

These are not all the rights of the older members of the family, especially of the family head, over their juniors. All elders may punish by beating, though the oldest member of the family exercises that right most freely and may chastise those who are themselves grown men and women. If there is gossip about a boy or a girl, the family head calls the culprit to reprimand him or, if he believes the case a serious one, to beat him. Among the peasants, particularly, grown men go down on their knees before their elders, when so ordered, for a beating. Such punishments may be particularly severe if the culprit does not soon ask pardon, for since all who are older have the right to beat a younger relative, it sometimes happens that the punishment administered by the head of the family is not considered adequate, and another takes up the stick when the family head has put it down, so that two or three wands may be broken over the back of a stubborn offender. If such a one were to fight back, he would become "accursed," ceasing any longer to be considered a member of the family, and even though no legal steps might be taken to disinherit him, he would lose all caste. This right to beat is accorded by custom rather than by law, but an adult beaten by one of the elders of his own family would think long before he would sue. "There is always a consultation, and a man is discouraged from going to court."

Lest the impression may have been given, in considering the role of the elders and their relationship to the younger members of the family, that it is those in the father's line alone who are concerned, it must be emphasized that relatives of both parents exercise substantial control over a person. More than this, since marriage constitutes an agreement between families as well as between an individual man and woman, it follows that both paternal and maternal grand-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

parents are friendly toward each other, so that the conflict that might result from a division of authority rarely develops. Were it otherwise, it could easily happen that a person who had been ordered, or forbidden, to do something against his own wishes by the head of his paternal family would plead with the head of his mother's group and receive support to justify his disobedience. To most Haitians such a hypothetical incident was amusing to contemplate, for the elders are said always to work together. Rare is the occasion when one interferes with the decision of another, and never to the knowledge of the subject of such a decision.

A family elder who has no sons to care for him is well looked after by the other members of the group "until the grave." Fear as well as a moral obligation prompts this. "He might curse you," it is explained, or "He might say: 'Watch out for your own old age! You mistreated me in my old age, and you will suffer in yours.'" Such pronouncements are greatly dreaded, especially because of his control over the supernatural forces that aid or harm the family and its members.

The closeness of the tie between social institutions and economic life is most evident in the matter of inheritance. For though the prestige that accrues from the possession of wealth makes for strong competition through the exercise of individual initiative, yet supporting the struggle of an individual for the augmentation of his holdings are the forces of family sanction and family aid, while his very start in life is obtained primarily through the help of his relatives during their lifetime or the property he inherits from them at their death.

As has been suggested, all a man's children by a "legally" married wife inherit from him, or, if he has not espoused a wife by a Church wedding, the children of his *placée* wife or wives receive his property. Whether or not it is true that the "legitimate" children inherit three quarters of the possessions of their father, the "natural" children one fourth, and

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

In the early years of independence, Emperor Henry Christophe in the north and President Pétion in the south tried to stem the disintegration of the magnificent plantations. Christophe's measures in the region he controlled were sometimes stern, according to legend; but the plantation system and the plantations themselves gradually fell into decay, along with the aqueducts, the warehouses, and the sugar mills. For the Haitian had returned to a tradition of landholding antedating his enslavement.

Europe's loss of the Pearl of the Antilles aroused bitter words from Frenchmen and Englishmen for the better part of the century. They accused the Negro of laziness and lack of ability, repeating endlessly that only as a colony could Haiti ever be of any use to anybody. The London *Times* deplored the Haitian's unwillingness to work for wages, speculating that he had "no desire for property strong enough to induce him to labor with sustained power." In the United States, antiabolitionist enthusiasts cited the Haitian situation as an example of what would happen to the American economy if the slaves were freed.

The Haitian's reluctance to work for wages did not reflect an aversion to owning property, however, as the London *Times* supposed. On the contrary, it was engendered by his desire for property. The land was there and waiting, only needing a house to be built upon it, and to be cleared and tilled. The typical Haitian wanted not dubious, seasonal wage work but a farm of his own. The more ambitious peasant aspired to two farms, or even three, with a homestead and a family on each.

If a man worked hard and made a success of one plot, he could put away money and eventually buy a second. The additional land might be separated by some miles from the original farm. On the new ground the man would build another house and take another wife to take care of it in his absence. Known as *plaçage*, this arrangement had complete community sanction. A man whose energies and good fortune made an extra household possible was expected to make such an arrangement. It was not a new institution bred in the chaos following the Revolution, nor was it, as some missionaries held, an evidence of moral deterioration of the Haitian character. It was simply a persisting concept of West African life.[2,3] The woman who occupied the second or third household was not a concubine. Like the first wife, she had enhanced prestige in her community. She had authority and responsibility. Her work, her position, and her rewards were not essentially different from those of the first wife.[2,3] It is true that her marriage was not consecrated by a church or civil ceremony, but, ordinarily, neither was that of the first wife. Contrary to European misconceptions, such unions were true marriages in the sense that they had full sanction of the community.

[Footnotes appear in Category 116, pp. 351-352 --Analyst]

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

565 paring to try to move one step up the social ladder. Shoes are a sym-
511 bol: wearing these, one must also wear a suit instead of a faded shirt and patched trousers; the suit demands personal cleanliness and a better home; all these lead the country man to town life with its additional expenses. So arduous a climb does not allure many of the Haitian common folk.

565 Because the standard of living, with its tangibles and intangibles,
181 clearly separates the castes, the élite observe all the rules with rigor. Their etiquette is formal. Culture (in the popular, not the anthropological meaning) is respected with almost religious devotion.

565 Since the maintenance of a high standard of living is costly, it is
511 obvious that another source of caste distinction lies in the inequalities
434 of wealth and property. Wealth is a relative term, however, and the Haitian peasant is so poor that by contrast a few hundred dollars' income a year will seem like riches. The élite live economically by American standards, yet even parsimonious spending of money may, when governed by a consciousness of social distinctions, make the peak of aristocracy unassailable.

565 The élite live in towns. Many of them own country estates, but
369 regard these as secondary to their residences in Port-au-Prince, Pétionville, Cap-Haïtien, Jérémie, and the other few towns. To live a rural life is to be isolated, out of the stream of fashion, news, social activity. What profession can one follow in a rustic valley? One who is class-conscious must see and be seen by others of his class, otherwise he would be forgotten by "those who count." In the towns are the schools; there French is spoken; there, and there only, financial and social opportunities exist. True, plebeians form the majority of the population even in the towns, so that urbanization alone is not a mark of caste; it must be taken in conjunction with the others.

565 Formal marriage is another requisite for membership in the élite.
581 As will shortly be apparent, sex relations in Haiti are quite casual, as judged by American standards. The majority of Haitian families are established by parents who have gone through neither a civil nor a religious ceremony. This is not to imply that spouses are unfaithful to each other, or that there is not mutual respect within the family circle; it merely means that most people regard formal marriage as a luxury which they cannot afford, or in any case as a ceremony which custom has made superfluous. Once again, however, the aristocrat holds to the form. If a family can point to legal marriages among

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

565
581

several generations of ancestors, there can be little question of its high social position.

565
771

Religion affords still another distinction between high and low. Haiti has a folk religion which American tourists call Voodoo (a name which makes them think immediately of superstitious emotionalism or some kind of occult balderdash), but which is more properly called Vodun. It is a true religion in that it answers for the native the questions arising in the world he knows, while giving him confidence to face the crises of life. Vodun is African in origin, Créole in its language, and homely in its creed and practice; none of these makes it any less a religion. The official religion of the country, on the other hand, is Roman Catholicism. Few members of the élite, however their hearts may yearn for the consoling securities of Vodun, dare openly either to acknowledge their "atavism" or to participate in the cult. They must be Catholics or agnostics. It is often remarked that below the surface many a professing Catholic aristocrat cherishes Vodun beliefs; the important fact is that he keeps his folk worship secret. Because the outside world ridicules Vodun as superstition, and because the approved Catholic Church fights it, government restrictions effectively keep its ritual out of the public gaze. All the discriminatory laws, however, have not weakened its hold upon the masses. It is because Vodun is a *folk* religion that the élite cannot permit themselves to adhere to it openly.

565
829

The final and most complicated distinction between the two castes is skin color. Any generalization on this matter is open to numerous exceptions; moreover, the whole question of color in Haiti touches the most sensitive nerves of the upper classes. One must begin by such casual observations as these: the vast majority of the lower orders are definitely dark or even black; the lighter the skin, the more likely a person is to belong to the élite. It is true that there are black aristocrats, and it is equally true that numbers of peasants have light complexions. At almost any function in high society, however, the proportion of dark-skinned persons is decidedly small. Among the youth, the tendency is always to select a spouse whose skin color is light; marriages are often made between aristocrats and white foreigners resident in Haiti, so that the children may lighten the family complexion. While it is therefore inaccurate to assert that no full-blooded Negroes belong to the élite, it is also clear that lighter persons tend to have social advantages.

581
144

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 565 took their place in the business life of the towns, sending their children to parish schools. Colored youths served in the colonial constabulary and in the militia, acquiring a knowledge of arms and warfare later to be useful to them.

175 565 423 567 162 Estimates of their wealth vary. Some say that in 1791 they owned a third of all the land in the colony and a fourth of all the slaves; others more conservative put the figure at one fifth of each. Even this is impressive enough to account for much of the growing jealousy of their position. And by 1791 the whites outnumbered them only ten to seven.[5]

562 595 563 175 581 White women in general added their support to a movement instigated by the petits blancs for discrimination against all gens de couleur. Many wives felt resentment against the colored people because of the frequency with which their husbands took colored mistresses.[6] Moreover, the wealth of the colony attracted an immigration of Frenchwomen with marriageable but undowered daughters—in the candid French phrase, "*de filles à marier et sans dot*"—who seem to have assumed that young planters would want white French wives, even though impecunious ones. It was a shock to quite a number of them to discover that a colonial youth might prefer a colored girl who brought a dowry with her.[7]

175 565 829 Indiscreet affranchis often gave additional grounds for resentment against their group. Wishing to dissociate themselves altogether from their Negro ancestry and to be assured of social eminence, some accounted for their dark complexions by reference to obscure Indian progenitors. On this ground many secured letters patent from local government officials, of course on payment of a fee, legally estab-

162 5. The census listed 40,000 whites to 28,000 colored. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description . . . de la partie française . . . de Saint-Domingue* (Philadelphia, 1797), I, 285, gave the following figures for 1790:

	Square Leagues	*Population*	*Whites*	*Affranchis*	*Slaves*
North	480	195,000	16,000	9,000	170,000
West	820	194,000	14,000	12,500	168,000
South	186	130,000	10,000	6,500	114,000
Totals	1,486	519,000	40,000	28,000	452,000

6. One governor reported to Paris that he considered sexual jealousy the greatest cause of unrest in the colony.

7. See Sir Harry H. Johnston, *The Negro in the New World* (New York, 1910), p. 141.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

IX

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

TOLERANT understanding of the ways of alien people is rare in matters relating to sex. Occasionally we may regard marital and sexual practices which differ from our own as amusing or ridiculous; more frequently we find them distasteful and disgusting. A long religious heritage has implanted in us a definite personal morality, familiar in Puritanism and in the codes of the great majority of early American pioneers. Accompanying and dominated by this religious aspect has been the legal idea of sexual morality. A middle-class tradition of private property, hence of orderly marriages legally recognized, has schooled us for centuries to approve certain moral and sexual rules: monogamic marriage, children born in wedlock, a public wedding ceremony by approved authorities, censure of sexual relations which might confuse the passage of property. Although sympathetic tolerance for foreign ways has never been an outstanding American characteristic, it is least evident in connection with divergent sexual practices. We do not remind ourselves of the utilitarian basis of a part of our own sexual codes.

Where people have economic and social backgrounds different from those of Western Europe and the United States, other codes will prevail. Elements which have made American moral standards what they are were lacking or appeared in different form in Haiti. Instead of middle-class European tradition there was African tribal practice; instead of diffused small private properties there was slavery; instead of the Puritan notion that sex relations were in general sinful was the less rigorous view that sexual intercourse was entirely normal; instead of the example of monogamous family life constantly before the minds of children growing up, there was the example of libertinage among lofty whites and laxness among the blacks.

Nothing in the experience of the slave régime could have predisposed toward orderly marriage these people, soon to become Haitians. Certain masters actually prohibited weddings among their slaves, while most others discouraged it, since the development of family ties among the blacks would only have made for complication

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 when slaves were to be sold. Even when whole families were brought
567 over together from Africa, it was considered discreet in Saint-
581 Domingue to separate the various members at the slave market, so
[794] that there would be little chance of combinations and intrigues. Theoretically the Church was in favor of regular marriages between slave men and women, but even if the Africans had understood or desired the "sacrament," the opposition of the white planters would have been enough to curb missionary insistence on this point; the Jesuits had already been expelled from the colony for their too great zeal in plantation reforms.

175 As a usual thing, then, slaves simply cohabited. It was not against
567 the rules of a plantation for a slave and the woman with whom he
588 consorted to live together in a slave hut with the children born to
[843] them; but neither was it against the rules for the overseer to put other slaves into the same hut, or to sell promising slave children as if they were cattle.[1] Little was done to prevent sex relations between slaves, although masters had varying attitudes toward the results of these relations: some planters welcomed births as a stockbreeder welcomes additions to his herd; others resented the pregnancy of slave women as an obstacle to necessary field work. In the former case, a planter's capital was increased; in the latter, abortions resulted when the overseer drove pregnant women to hard work under the tropical sun.

175 The freedom of the planters with the persons of their attractive
567 female slaves likewise weakened any tendency toward monogamous
588 family life as conceived by bourgeois European society. The relationship between master and slave woman was momentary. Not often was a woman so beguiling that she could be called a concubine; still less often was she a mistress. The latter estate was the height of any female slave's worldly ambition, for not only might she then be freed, but she could live a life of leisure. In rare cases she might hope to persuade her white paramour into marriage. Almost certainly her mulatto children would be free.

175 In so far as there was any predisposition toward strict observance of
565 European marriage practices, it was most clearly exhibited by the
581 group of affranchis. As freedmen they were intent upon establishing

[567] [581] 1. Under exceptional circumstances slaves found themselves under a benevolent, religious master who allowed them to be married by a priest and thereafter to live together as a family.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

themselves and their families economically and socially. Property was important, so they took pains to insure the legitimacy of their heirs; color was crucial, and so they regulated the marriages of their children to be sure there was no reversion to the black strain. They guarded their fortunes solicitously, provided their daughters with dowries large enough sometimes even to lure a white husband, educated their sons in Paris—behaved, in short, as if they had been pillars of society in provincial France. Like the white planters, the male affranchis often had relations with slave women, but even more rarely than whites were they seduced into marriage with women of the lower orders.

When the slave insurrection and its aftermath freed the half-million blacks in Saint-Domingue it was not to be expected that European middle-class morals and practices should suddenly prevail. Modern usage emerges from the womb of tradition. Neither in Africa nor in the colony had tradition taught the blacks respect for monogamy or for marriage entered into by religious ceremony. If the ex-slaves had reverted to their Dahomean, Congolese, or other African background, they might have introduced the bride price; but to pay a bride price is to assume the existence of wealth, an assumption contrary to fact among the ex-slaves in Saint-Domingue of the 1790's, and Haiti of the 1800's. In neither Dahomey nor the Congo was there much ceremony at the union of a couple; what there was consisted mostly of singing and dancing. If, on the other hand, the people went only by what they had observed in slave days, there was no tradition of binding union or strict codes, as we understand them. A man knew when to stay away from another man's woman; children remained near their mother—these two statements almost cover the situation as of 1796 among the newly freed slaves.

Toussaint, apparently a conventional person in what concerned social behavior, wished his people to be "moral." He instituted a time of "holy masses, mystic communions, biblical psalms, and divine ecstasies"[a] for his private edification, and recommended the same for his people. He could not possibly have instilled into them a desire for Christian marriage, however; even if he could, priests would not have been available for the wholesale marrying of scores of thousands of men and women. Local records of weddings at this period are very scanty.

a. Saint-Rémy, *Pétion et Haïti*, III, 93.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

erosity and equity now gave way to malevolence and personal license: 114

Putting no restraint upon his passions, he travelled about, followed by actors, dancers, musicians, and courtesans. An indefatigable dancer, as soon as he arrived in a place he gave a ball. Under Toussaint Louverture, in order to please the Governor-General everyone approached the holy altar; under Dessalines one gained glory by dancing well. The Emperor, giving himself up to scandalous pleasures, forgot that he was head of the state. The greatest immorality reigned about him. With a gaiety sometimes grotesque, he told the ladies who frequented his court how much he admired their beauty, no matter how ugly they actually were. Following his example, his major officers of state kept concubines in every town in the empire. . . . When the emperor entered a town, the honest women were gravely disturbed, for their virtue was menaced not only by him but also by his officers of state. Many mothers kept their daughters shut up to keep them from the notice of those who were powerful enough to take them, with impunity, by violence.[3]

643 159 831

Marriage, then, looked at from the standards of any white Western country, was in a sorry state in Haiti. Continued warfare had broken up many even of the families which, though unrecognized by the white planters, had nevertheless been formed during slavery; and the camp life of soldiers roaming the countryside confirmed the casual attitude of the people toward sex. Every ex-slave was a hero, and liberty was sweet. Under Dessalines it was scarcely wise for a prominent man to marry an attractive wife, the Emperor might so soon set himself to seduce her. Above all, there was no tradition of formal marriage. This was the chief factor to bear upon future marriage and sexual customs of the Haitians; and in appraising them is the paramount fact to keep in mind.

175 831 581

Meanwhile, children were being born. Their mothers were known, but often the fathers were not, for the vast majority of infants were born out of wedlock. Dessalines, a realist except in matters which touched his vanity, saw the necessity of establishing a status for these children, not on grounds of morality but for economic expediency, to avoid future disputes over inheritance. French precedent did not serve his need, for according to French law an illegitimate child may not inherit: a parent in France is not free to leave his property as he will, but must pass it on to his legitimate heirs.

175 848 428

3. Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, III, 239.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 While the broad problems of marriage, inheritance, and legiti-
582 macy were not to be solved by the official act of any ruler, the efforts made, particularly those by Dessalines and Christophe, had their effect upon the development of the marital institution in Haiti.

671 "Whereas," begins the preamble of Dessalines' law of May 28,
848 1805, "it is necessary to fix in immutable order the status and rights of children born out of wedlock, and whereas it is important to reconcile what nature and society owe them with the political interests of the state," therefore it behooves the government to lay
• [581] down the specific rules which follow. Nothing in the law pushes the people toward marriage, but every provision strengthens the family, which they had known both in Africa and in the slave régime of the colony.

175 Henceforth no stigma is to attach to the fact of illegitimacy, nor is
671 there to be discrimination in favor of children born in wedlock. The
848 status of a child will depend upon recognition by its parents. If a
428 child's maternal connection is established, he has rights in her property; if the father likewise recognize his offspring, the child has rights in the paternal property; even if the recognition of a child is so long delayed that the parents die, that child who can prove his descent is to receive the name and his own share of property from the deceased. There is but one single provision in which an illegitimate child has an inferior status: should a couple decide to be legally married, they must recognize the natural offspring of either party before or during the wedding ceremony, if such children are to have full claims of inheritance; delay until after the ceremony cuts their claim to only one fourth that of children born legitimately; refusal to recognize the natural child disinherits him, unless he can prove his descent.

[422] Since the Emperor was already engaged upon his campaign to
[423] acquire lands for the state, the property rights guaranteed would refer chiefly to personal property, and only secondarily to land still owned by individuals. Both men and women owned personal property, however, and must therefore pass on this property, a definite percentage going to each son and daughter.

The law is weak in some of its details. It does not specify, for example, how an unmarried father shall leave his property—whether by name to each child he has recognized as his own, or by name to the mothers of his children. It is strong in that it is simple: property

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

must pass to an illegitimate child if recognition is accorded. It is likewise strong in its harmony with actual conditions: in the absence of legal marriage among the people, it would have been manifestly unfair to favor a few fortunate children. Dessalines argued that the revolution had legitimized all Haitians; that it was unjust to prevent a child's inheriting from the person who had given him life; and that since all Haitians had come out of slavery and degradation into freedom, no new inequalities should be instituted.[4]

If this law encouraged family life, it weakened marriage both of the civil and religious kind: where was the sense in the expensive luxury of a wedding when children were just as legitimate without it? By conforming to folk practice the Emperor confirmed it. Only the aristocrats disliked his law, for it seemed to make light of one of the distinctions they cherished—the formal wedding. It irked them to have the State place a casual child upon an equal plane with one born after proper marriage.

At still another point the law accorded with living conditions at the time. During the years of fighting many men had been killed, and always the large standing army kept thousands of others away from settled farm life. Home, then, was for a child the abode of his mother—a fact recognized by the law's insistence upon maternal relationship rather than paternity. Such a word as "matriarchate" has no place here; but from the days of Dessalines to modern times, the lowly Haitian thinks of his home primarily as where his mother lives.

As if the advantages of formal wedding were not already sufficiently weakened by this law, other enactments of the empire struck at other phases of marriage. Divorce was permitted for adultery, for incompatibility of temperament or character, and by mutual consent. Such provisions not only broke away completely from Catholic practice, but made getting out of wedlock a casual matter of taking an oath. The complaint of incompatibility need be made by only one spouse; "mutual consent" as a ground for divorce was probably not allowed in 1805 in any other country of the Western World.

Dessalines did not appear to care one whit for the good opinion of white foreigners. It sufficed for him if Haiti endured, whatever Europeans thought of her. Christophe, on the other hand, was extremely sensitive to foreign disapproval. Many of his official acts can

4. According to the testimony of Madiou, *op. cit.*, III, 216.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 643 648

be explained only as efforts to win outside respect for his kingdom of blacks. He was aware of the scorn in which white people held the apparent absence of all sexual morality in Haiti, and so set about introducing reforms. Even as a general he had opposed the dissoluteness of Dessalines.

175 643 582 671 581 [595]

In an early pronouncement Christophe proscribes concubinage (by which he meant the unmarried unions of the people), libertinage, and "all those disorders which weaken the family." To proscribe an evil is not necessarily to put an end to it, however, and so he tried also to persuade and educate his people to the habit of full legal marriage. His steps at persuasion were various. In speeches he urged weddings upon his subjects; yet a man could see little reason for tying himself to one woman for life, assuming *legal* responsibilities at an expense, when already from experience he knew that he could have a woman's loyalty without the ceremony. Although weddings somewhat increased after 1806, Christophe's verbal campaign was a failure. He next tried force. In one town he made all the females assemble in the public square; then, separating the married from the unmarried, commanded his royal guards to advance, each to select an unmarried woman who should become his wife. At other times he selected young men and women by lot and had them married "by their King's authority." No nobleman in the kingdom could long remain unwed: indeed, Queen Victoria might have approved Christophe's solicitude for the moral uprightness of the Haitian court.

175 671 848 428

Another means by which Christophe forced his people into formal marriage was the indirect one of attacking property rights. Realizing that Dessalines' law by guaranteeing inheritance to natural children encouraged people to remain unmarried, he rescinded it by one of the first acts of his rule.[5] This act reëstablished French practice, making it all but impossible for illegitimate children to inherit anything. Most persons of property found this law persuasive where words had left them cold. Madiou thought the law "excessively severe in a country where nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of the population were born out of wedlock,"[6] and he spoke of its disharmony with general practice at the time. Actually, it seems not radically to have affected the masses but only the fairly well-to-do.

5. Law of March 25, 1807.
6. Madiou, *op. cit.*, III, 411.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

it seems not radically to have affected the masses but only the fairly well-to-do.

The *Royal Almanac* for the year 1814 touches proudly upon the moral state of the kingdom. The author of the almanac, the Comte de la Limonade, says: "Great attention is paid to morals and manners. Marriage is honored, protected, and encouraged; no Haitian who is unmarried can fill any place of distinction. Divorce is not permitted." All this was true; yet the mass of Haitians still remained unmarried. Nevertheless, the quotation indicates the extent to which Christophe had gone in his effort to reform marriage and morals among his people; to set them in the European tradition and draw them out of their African and colonial backgrounds.

While Christophe was trying to effect reforms in the North, Pétion was accepting his Southern folk as they were. Hardly a law during his twelve-year administration touches the subject of marriage. The élite colored people continued to make proper legal marriages and so insure the inheritance of their legitimate children. The common folk lived their family lives without weddings, and if property questions arose, custom ruled, backed by public opinion in their little communities.

Such are the backgrounds out of which modern Haitian sex relations have developed. From African tradition came family life, the importance of property to stabilize a union, insignificance of a wedding ceremony, familiarity with matrilineal kinship and descent; from French colonial practice, formal marriage to establish a family with social ambition, casual sex relations for pleasure outside this marriage, the claim of legitimate children to all property (in contrast to folk custom, where few legitimate children were born); from Dessalines, an emphasis upon the African tradition and realism; from Christophe, an insistence upon strict French practice in marriage and in the passage of property.

From among these alternatives Haiti made a choice which is an excellent example of what Keller calls "automatic selection in the mores."[1] There was no congress to select one procedure rather than another. Because Pétion and Boyer followed a *laissez-faire* policy in social matters, the people took the path of least resistance.

1. A. G. Keller, *Societal Evolution* (revised ed., New York, 1931) chaps. IV and V.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

[p. 186]

X

HOME LIFE OF THE ÉLITE

ONE brief characterization of the élite might be that they are those who carefully observe the proprieties. The proprieties are those of France, and among them is "common sense" in marriage.

People of privilege in colonial times, which were the fountainhead of élite tradition, lived at ease and did not concern themselves with manual labor. Nor were they burdened by puritanical codes of sexual morality, but on the contrary enjoyed sex relations with whatever attractive women came their way. But they would have thought it sheer folly to allow momentary delight to interfere with the very practical matter of choosing a wife. Marriage meant increasing one's fortune, strengthening one's social position and connections, establishing one's children. Romance was as irrelevant to all this as to choosing a business partner. This attitude of the French planters, current even in France of the present day, was the standard for freedmen.

Even when wealth was most plentiful in colonial society it had not been always easy to find the proper wife for an affranchi youth. For a man to remain single, however, did not mean that he remained celibate. He might, on the contrary, contract a fairly permanent informal union of love, while discreetly refraining from a marriage which would jeopardize his own or his family's status. Such informal unions were not generally regarded as immoral. Good taste, it was felt, was a sufficient guide in all matters of sex outside of marriage.

The unsettled condition of the colony between the slave insurrection of 1791 and the achievement of independence in 1803–4 did not change the affranchi concept of suitable marriage. During the brief two-year rule of Dessalines, the ideal of propriety in marriage remained the same in spite of the Emperor's efforts to undermine the importance of legal weddings and the legitimacy of children. Pétion, upon his accession in 1806, showed himself a true member of the mulatto aristocratic group—indifferent to the morals of the masses so long as custom settled their problems for them, and content with the marriage traditions of the élite. He said publicly what was neces-

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 565 581 sary for a president to say as to proper respect for moral principles, then left morality to take care of itself.

175 588 585 581 During Pétion's time and that of Boyer there came into common usage the convenient term "*plaçage*" to describe the extramarital unions of respectable people. "Concubinage" was a crude word, with definite overtones of disapprobation; plaçage was more indirect, and carried no connotation of disrepute. Briefly, plaçage was the union of a man and a woman for pleasure, companionship, and a measure of home life, without the assumption by either person of any legal obligations. A man might make as many of these tentative unions as his disposition, his finances, and his tact dictated. Often enough they were with women of his own social class, for Haiti had an excess of women over men; but generally they were contracted with pleasing women of the lower social orders. Young men not yet financially able to marry, younger brothers whose inheritance was too small to support a family, husbands who had married for practical purposes rather than for love, and eagerly lustful men—these were the usual participators in plaçage.

Although for a woman a church wedding might be the height of ambition, and proper parents tried to see that their daughters achieved it, there came to be a feeling that no disgrace attached to being *placée*. Certainly at the beginning a wife outranked a placée, just as in colonial New England a wife outranked an old maid; but to be placée was a far better lot in Haiti than to be a spinster in Massachusetts Bay colony. No one would have thought of calling a placée by so inaccurate a term as "mistress"; still less would anyone have assailed her moral standing. A man who had a mistress might keep his arrangements with her secret; but plaçage unions were, or came to be, quite open. The one great flaw in the arrangement was that near middle age a man might cease to care about his union with the woman. Foresight and adaptability were the only safeguards against this fate.

565 581 588 Nowhere else in the Western World has there been so little actual marriage in proportion to the population as in Haiti. Whether technically it is correct to speak of peasant unions as examples of plaçage is a matter of opinion; certainly the peasants rarely marry. Thousands of Haitian couples in all walks of life could be found at any period since 1804 living quietly together from youth to age, bringing up a family of children with as much order as do others who have had a

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

581 wedding to consecrate their state. These unions might be called
565 (after Anglo-Saxon usage) common-law marriages. Many such
588 couples have, late in life, gone through the wedding ceremony at the *insistence of children aspiring to social prestige.*

175 Haitian writers have frequently felt it necessary to explain and
114 justify to the outside world the practice of plaçage. Thus Saint-Rémy
581 in 1857 wrote: "*Plaçage*, or primitive marriage, is still one of the
588 Haitian customs. It requires no civil or religious formality. I must
565 confess that some of these unions are more respectable than those sanctified by civil and religious law."[1] Dantès Bellegarde in 1934 implied (erroneously) that the practice had always been one limited primarily to peasants. He said:

> Haitians have been accused of immorality because they practice free unions. This reproach is unjust. Concubinage is without doubt the rule among the people [that is, the peasants and workmen]; but it constitutes a sort of *connubium injustum* (unlegal marriage) which, in many cases, has nothing immoral about it, certain "plaçages" having more solidity and seriousness than a large number of regular marriages. In order to understand the existence of this custom and its persistence in the lower classes of Haitian society, one must go back to the colonial epoch: the whites kept
> [162] numerous concubines, white women being few in Saint-Domingue. (The white population of Saint-Domingue was composed in 1789 of 30,826 souls, of whom 21,166 were men and 9,660 women—not counting soldiers and sailors.) On the other hand, the Negroes did not marry each other, because they did not care at all to have wives whom the master might "abuse," to use the word of Père du Tertre; moreover, masters did not require their slaves to be married: they mated them with a view to obtaining fine "products."
>
> Concubinage tends to disappear among us, or at least to become more discreet. In the cultivated class people generally marry, and the girls in most modest condition—having passed through the primary schools—resign themselves willingly today to the diversion of their unused affections to cats and other domestic animals if no one offers to lead such girls to the altar.[2]

175 Nineteenth-century visitors were generally shocked by plaçage,
581 just as middle-class people are usually shocked by sex ways which
588 seem franker than their own. That the Haitian practice was a practical one, based upon a desire to preserve property intact within the

1. *Pétion et Haïti*, V, 66 note.
2. *Un Haïtien parle* (Port-au-Prince, 1934), pp. 30-31.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

family and to make only "sensible" marriages, was a fact rarely glimpsed by the critics. A good example of their attitude is the statement of the pious English Quaker, John Candler, in 1842:

> But few of the merchants or principal inhabitants are married men: concubinage is common, and unhappily, regarded as not dishonorable. Whenever a ball is given, or a large party invited, the invitation is equally extended to "Monsieur and Madame ——" or to "Monsieur —— and his lady"; and by this compounding of moral distinctions among the upper classes, the evil descends to the lower ranks and becomes perpetuated.[3]

And later Candler accuses Haitian mothers of being "utterly dead to all moral considerations," because they do not take pains to instill (middle-class English) ideals of morality, or teach the young the evils of "wayward passion."

Not even Haitian authors were willing to accept plaçage as a desirable practice. Beaubrun Ardouin explained that the color prejudice of colonial times was responsible for what he clearly considered an evil.[4] "The aristocracy of skin" made plaçage prevail over "divine law," for whites would not often in colonial times marry colored women. The same prejudice in the republic kept light-colored men from marrying darker women, but not from living with them. Ardouin believed that Haiti would gain infinitely by adopting "*les bonnes moeurs*," not on moral grounds, but for practical reasons. With regular marriage, he says, there would result a greater fixity of the conjugal state and more confidence on the part of the women, "who too often discover that they are only the satisfaction of a whim"; also the men would reflect more upon the consequence of an infidelity which, in dividing families, might separate children from father or mother and so greatly weaken the delicate relations of paternal love and filial piety. Still another consideration was political: the dispersion which resulted in the inheritance of property when many mothers and children compete. Because of plaçage unions, quite a number of estates had been reduced to almost nothing.

As the century progressed, the custom of plaçage prevailed from the President down to the humblest peasant. The women of the President were visited publicly by him; sometimes he was accompanied on his visits by a staff or selected officers of state. The critical

3. *Brief Notices of Hayti*, pp. 24, 25.
4. *La Géographie de l'Île d'Haïti*, pp. 181, 96 ff.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

175 Englishman, Sir Spenser St. John, said that he had met placées of the
581 President at dinner, and was asked to trace resemblances between
588 children and their reported father. "No one seeks to conceal it, and
643 the conversation of married ladies continually turns on this subject. One excuse for it is that many of the ladies whom you meet in society were only married after the birth of their first children. However, according to French law, that ceremony renders them all legitimate. Some of those admitted into society are not married at all, but their daughters being married, prevents notice being taken of the false position of the mother."[5]

565 In recent years the élite, although many continue to contract
581 plaçage unions, keep these arrangements quieter than formerly and tend to make them with women lower in the social scale than themselves. Formal and regular marriage is expected and approved among the upper classes of today. Indeed, one modern informant in answer to the question, "What is the primary test of membership among the élite?" replied without hesitation, "Five generations of marriage in the family."[6]

583 Formal marriage is not entered into lightly among the upper
565 classes. It is a serious business watched over by state, family, and church. The interest of the state seems to be to guard against bigamy. The possibility of bigamy is the more likely since one or the other contracting party may have formerly lived in plaçage. The interest of the family is in the wisdom of the alliance. Before a wedding can be performed both parties must have obtained the formal consent of their parents, besides having their banns published at their respective places of permanent residence. There seems to be some doubt whether the courts would uphold a father in his refusal to consent to the marriage of a son over twenty-one years old; but cases are known in which such a refusal has stopped the wedding. Of course, the daughters must always obtain parental consent to marry.

585 The civil wedding, adopted in Haiti at the beginning of her independence, is usually followed by a religious ceremony. The Church, like the State, takes precautions against clandestine marriages and bigamy. Notice of a projected union must be read from the pulpit

5. *Hayti, or the Black Republic*, I, 177–178.

[114] 6. John Lobb, in "Caste and Class in Haiti" (*American Journal of Sociology*, XLVI, [581] No. 1 [July, 1940], 29), states that "one informant defined family status as a position [554] resulting from the recognition that in a family the parents had, for generations, been legally married in the church."

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

Another observation must be set

alongside this professional testimony: many men, both aristocrats and common folk, have more than one placée, yet there seem to be enough women for Haitian men.

Although peasants in Haiti are rarely married by formal ceremony, the family is a dominant characteristic of peasant life. This sums up the domestic situation among the masses.

When it is recalled that the Negro, from the time he was taken from Africa on slave ships, had almost no experience of the European tradition of conventional marriage, one has a partial explanation of the absence of peasant weddings. For the rest the people are realists, arguing that a man should have as many women as he needs to carry on the economy of his land holdings; the law forbids polygamy, but exerts no control over plural unions which are entered without formal ceremony. It has therefore come to be regularly accepted in the mores that practical need should determine the number of women to one man. If a peasant increases his land holdings, if he buys or inherits a second farm on the other side of the mountain, it is only common sense for him to take a second woman, raise a family by her, and thus have an overseer and a labor supply resident on each of his properties. Everyone in the community knows what women belong to what man, and custom strongly taboos any tampering with another man's spouses.

Only the Catholic Church has statistics to reveal the infrequency of marriages among the masses. The story was the same a century ago as now. In the important parish of Gonaïves in 1825 the proportion of marriages to births was as 1 to 62; in 1826 they were as 1 to 54.[3] Both figures include marriages and births among the élite, and Gonaïves is a town: in the countryside the proportion of marriages would be much lower. The parish priest of Carrefours, which numbers about a thousand households, stated that in 1936 there had been only ten marriages among his six or eight thousand parishioners. Another parish priest estimated that only one half of one per cent of the baptisms performed were of children born to parents legally married. Even in the parish of Pétionville, home of many élite, a priest estimates that less than one child in five is born to married parents. A century ago a commandant at Léogane, speaking of a high army officer, said, "He is my brother-in-law: I live with his sister." Near Port-au-Prince lived a rural police captain with six placage

3. Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, II, 119-120.

spouses,

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

595 spouses. In the hills more than one peasant house was surrounded, as it would have been in Dahomey, by huts in each of which lived a "wife" of the farmer. Matters are not very different nowadays, except that men have learned the wisdom of not having their women live too close to each other.

162 582 From the guesses of experienced observers, it is probably not far wide of the mark to estimate that only one couple out of a hundred is married according to the approved mode of the Western World.

The State apparently does not care; or, to put it another way, government officials know how impossible it would be to alter a custom confirmed by long usage; one which, moreover, works well enough, since it causes practically no violence or legal cases for the 795 582 State to attend to. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, is eager to persuade the people to observe the sacrament of holy matrimony. The priests have assiduously endeavored to explore the peasant mind in order to learn what deters the average person from formal marriage. The reasons for the indifference to weddings might be listed as follows:

581 178 1. Inertia. There is no convincing reason to vary time-honored practice which works well enough, particularly since a wedding is likely to cause a great disturbance of daily routine and even a measure of jealousy on the part of those who have not made the display.

581 829 2. Suspicion of legal documents and civil officials. People who put their names (or marks) on documents and who call the attention of governmental officials to themselves are almost sure to rue the day. A man knows what can be demanded of him by custom in his informal unions; but who can say what the law would hold him responsible for?

581 585 3. Expense. The civil license costs; the priest and his assistants must be paid; to be married in church, one should wear shoes; if one wears shoes, one should dress up to them; a church wedding calls for a feast. At least two days must be spent away from work if the proper formalities are carried out.

581 595 4. Common sense in an inevitable situation. Both State and Church would try to limit a man to one wife; prosperity might demand two or more. Is it sensible to discriminate against a second woman, who might be just as much help to a man as his legal wife?

581 794 The Church through its priests works unceasingly to answer these arguments, but without notable success. Inertia is hard to overcome;

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

581 794 suspicion of legal complications is well founded: the priests therefore try to concentrate their attack upon the remaining motives. Thus one priest issued a notice at a certain mountain chapel that he would perform no weddings there for persons who wore shoes; an increase in weddings followed. By such devices, and by constant sermons on the significance of the sacrament, he has persuaded many of his parishioners to be married, yet the vast majority of them continue in plaçage.[4]

581 Informally entered unions among the peasants, then, rest upon a sound, practical, economic basis. If the priests are ever to be successful in their campaign for more weddings, Haitian peasant economy must undergo a change; even then the plurality of women (if indeed it exists), now more or less absorbed by plaçage, will work against the reform.

562 565 It is confusing to speak of "status" in connection with the domestic life of hard-working people, for status implies law, and law hardly touches peasant life. Custom governs all—inevitably, since the majority of peasant women have not been legally married, and since no peasant would willingly take a case to law. Yet women have a definite status as compared with men.

In almost every detail a peasant woman's life differs from that of élite women. The rule of life in country districts is unremitting labor 462 for the female from childhood up. She cooks and makes clothes, 565 labors in the fields after the men have cleared them, does the family 443 washing in the nearest stream, carries water, does whatever housework is required. Practically every Haitian peasant woman has her experience of going to market to sell the vegetables, trinkets, or [484] other wares her family may produce, and to buy necessities. This trip to market may be short, or as long as twenty miles. One of the characteristic sights of Haiti is the seemingly endless procession of women coming down from the hills trudging, or rather swinging majestically along, with a great load on the head, or riding on the haunches of a tiny donkey loaded with bulging panniers. Arrived at

4. As a result of his campaign for more weddings he has had some unusual experiences. Once, in the midst of the wedding ceremony, a bride rushed out of the chapel and shortly gave birth to a child; when she was able to move again, the ceremony was resumed. Again, traveling into the mountains to perform a similar ceremony, he found a crowd assembled under a tree, assisting at another birth of an infant to a bride-to-be. Sometimes he encounters the argument by a peasant that he will not consent to a wedding until his spouse has proved her fecundity by bearing a certain number of children.